



The Influence of Insecure Romantic Attachment on Generativity

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Abstract

Existing research concerning the development of generativity, the capacity to provide care and guidance to future generations, has primarily focused on the role of sociodemographic variables. However, one important feature that might be of importance for the study of generativity is insecure romantic attachment, given its influence on how people establish relationships with others. Still, the role of the two dimensions of insecure romantic attachment (i.e., anxiety and avoidance) on the most studied aspects of generativity (i.e., generative concern and generative acts) remains largely underexplored. Therefore, the present study investigates what contributes to generativity by exploring the role of sociodemographic features (i.e., age, gender, having children, years of education) and above all the two dimensions of insecure romantic attachment on generative concern and acts. A sample of 427 adults (age range: 25–65 years old) completed an online survey including romantic attachment and generativity measures. Afterwards, correlational and regression analyses were conducted to explore the data. Results showed that years of education positively predicted generative concern, whereas both anxiety and avoidance negatively predicted it. Yet, no sociodemographic feature nor dimension of insecure romantic attachment predicted generative acts. Thus, insecure romantic attachment could be a useful key to understanding generative concern.

Keywords Generativity · Generative concern · Generative acts · Romantic attachment · Anxiety · Avoidance

Introduction

Generativity “is primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation” (Erikson, 1963, p. 267). It can be expressed biologically and socially: the former manifests through giving birth to another human being and taking care of him/her; the latter consists in being able to provide guidance and direction not only to one’s children but also to all the other young individuals, accompanying them in their growth and leading them towards new achievements (Cigoli & Scabini, 2006).

One important characteristic that might be of importance for the study of generativity is insecure romantic attachment,

given its influence on forming relationships and promoting generative communities and societies. Romantic attachment represents the need of every human being to obtain and secure the availability, affection and closeness of a significant figure and also constitutes one of the main expressions of attachment in adulthood (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). More specifically, avoidance and anxiety are the two dimensions that specify individual differences in insecure romantic adult attachment, and they both reflect how comfortable people feel in a relationship characterized by physical and emotional closeness and intimacy (Brennan et al., 1998). Those who score high levels in the anxiety dimension are often involved in ruminations and worries about the possibility of being abandoned or rejected by others, whereas those with high levels in the avoidance dimension are more likely to be less engaged in relationships due to their desire to remain emotionally and psychologically independent (Butzer & Campbell, 2008).

Still, the role of insecure romantic attachment on generativity has not been investigated extensively, with researchers pointing to the association between the two constructs only theoretically (Bell & Richard, 2000; McAdams, 2000) or a few longitudinal studies mainly focusing on the associations

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of attachment styles and representations with generative concern in adolescence only (Lawford, 2008; Lawford et al., 2018). Therefore, in this paper, we will contribute to this body of knowledge by further exploring a possible connection between the two main dimensions of insecure romantic attachment that are anxiety and avoidance, and the two most studied aspects of generativity, that are generative concern and generative acts, in a large sample with adults. The importance of investigating this lies in the repercussions that insecure romantic attachment might have not only on how individuals perceive themselves and others but also on how they establish relationships and overall contribute to the well-being of society.

Generativity

The concept of generativity was introduced by Erik Erikson in 1950 in the context of a life-span theory of personality development. His model postulates that people advance through the eight stages of development based on how they adjust to crises throughout their lives. These crises are psychosocial because they involve the psychological needs of an individual conflicting with the needs of society. Ideally speaking, Erikson (1963) supposed that adults approach the crisis of the seventh stage of development, regarding the conflict between generativity versus stagnation, after having integrated a sense of who they are and having formed long-term bonds of intimacy through friendships and especially marriage. Then, they will be psychosocially ready to commit to society to improve it and make it a better place to live in for future generations (Erikson, 1963; McAdams, 2013). Initially, Erikson (1950) established that generativity may be expressed in bearing and raising children, but then he extended the concept to all forms of productivity and creativity placed at the service of future generations (Erikson, 1968).

Based on the works of Erikson (1969), researchers have redefined generativity as a need, a concern, a drive, an issue or a task linking the person and the social world (Kotre, 1984; McAdams, 1988; Vaillant & Milofsky, 1980). Nonetheless, it was in 1992 that McAdams and de St. Aubin introduced a new model according to which generativity was conceived in terms of seven interrelated features, such as “cultural demand” (i.e., what a particular society can offer to adults to motivate and shape their generative inclinations), “inner desire” (i.e., a desire for symbolic immortality), “generative concern” (i.e., a conscious recognition and appreciation for what has been generated by accident, necessity or love), “belief in the species” (i.e., a general and basic faith in the original goodness and worthwhileness of human life), “commitment” (i.e., creating, maintaining or offering), “generative action” (i.e., the capacity to generate things and people, the fundamental ability to give birth both figuratively

and literally speaking), and finally “personal narration” (i.e., the inner narration about what we plan to do in the future to leave a legacy of the self for next generations).

In more recent times, the relational-symbolic model (Cigoli & Scabini, 2006) has further investigated the construct of generativity. This fairly new theoretical paradigm reckons generativity as a pivotal element which overcomes, exceeds and transforms the individual identities of the partners in every romantic relationship. It expresses itself as the ability to give human form to what has been created biologically or as responsible care towards younger generations (Scabini & Cigoli, 2012). Therefore, both McAdams and de St. Aubin () and Cigoli and Scabini (2006) consider generativity as a complex relational construct that focuses on the individual in interaction with family and social contexts to learn how to care for the next generations. In addition to this, Snarey (1993) emphasizes how generative or degenerative processes start from the experiences we make in our family and are then transmitted in society because what happens between generations in families and what happens in society is related and these processes influence each other.

Sociodemographic Variables as Predictors of Generativity

Traditionally, in social and developmental psychology, researchers have been interested in investigating what sociodemographic variables (i.e., age, gender, having children, years of education) were able to predict higher levels of generativity.

About the role of age on generativity, there have been empirical analyses (Keyes & Ryff, 1998; McAdams, 2013; McAdams, 2019; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; McAdams et al., 1998) that have shown higher levels of generativity among midlife and older adults than younger adults. According to several authors (Peterson, 1998; Ryff & Heinicke, 1983; Stewart & Vandewater, 1998), this discrepancy could be explained by understanding that even though young adults may feel a strong desire towards altruistic and prosocial activities as volunteering to make positive contributions to future generations, they may also find it difficult to translate these intentions into effective generative actions until they have attained a higher status and the psychological, material and economic resources that often come with middle age.

Concerning gender, other studies (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; McAdams et al., 1998) have also underlined it can interact with contextual factors capable of shaping trajectories and levels of generativity over time (Stewart & Ostrove, 1998). Therefore, women and men may have to face different generative challenges and respond to expectations based on gender belonging, especially regarding the time socially considered right to show their biological

generativity as well as the possible nature of it (Miller-McLemore, 2004). Furthermore, as for the influence of having children on generativity, investigations conducted by some authors (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; McAdams et al., 1998) have shown that having children, regardless of the number of them, is intimately linked to men's generativity, while in women the levels of generativity are not associated with motherhood. More specifically, in "A theory of generativity and its assessment through self-report, behavioral acts, and narrative themes in autobiography", McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) examined the relations among the variables of sex, having children (yes vs. no) and generativity, and their analyses yielded striking findings. They found out that the relationship between having children and generativity as assessed on the LGS is markedly strong among men but only mildly evident among women. In fact, in their study, men who were fathers showed a mean generativity score of 45.2, as compared with men without children, who showed a mean score of 38.2. On the other hand, the comparable means among women were 42.2 and 41.5, respectively. Thus, whether a man has ever been a father to a child seems to make a difference in predicting his generativity score on the LGS, but the same cannot be said for a woman. To respect these previous findings, in model 2 we have decided to add the interaction effect between gender and having children to model 1, which only included sociodemographic variables as predictors of generativity.

Finally, regarding the effect of education on generativity, some scholars (Keyes & Ryff, 1998; McAdams et al., 1993; Stewart & Ostrove, 1998), have underlined how generativity is also shaped by social stratification processes embodied in each community, and these processes are influenced by the level of education and the socioeconomic status that is obtained because of it. This can easily be understood in today's post-modern society in which the level of education and the number of professional qualifications achieved are usually considered crucial to have access to a wider range of job opportunities (Jonsson & Mills, 1993). The resources at one's disposal also depend on having a certain job with a peculiar role in it (Piff et al., 2010). All these aspects could affect the quality of one's life, the belief in the goodness of mankind, and the intent to commit to the social world and future generations by caring for others and implementing concrete generative behaviors.

Even though existing findings have primarily focused their attention on the influence of sociodemographic variables on generativity, in more recent years there has been an increase in studies interested in investigating the role of psychological features on generativity. In particular, a psychological construct lately proposed as involved in the development of generativity is that of romantic attachment.

Insecure Romantic Attachment as a Predictor of Generativity

The first author to talk about individual differences in the functioning of the attachment system in the context of couple's relationships was Bowlby in 1979. Later on, authors such as Hazan and Shaver (1987) and Mikulincer and Shaver (2003) illustrated the main aspects of the two types of romantic attachment: (1) people with secure attachment can balance attachment, caregiving and sex within a romantic relationship while experiencing true intimacy with the partner; (2) people with insecure attachment, on the other hand, are often concerned about the partner's availability and reliability (anxious subjects) or are incapable to depend on others due to their fear of intimacy (avoidant subjects). The mentioned above findings and some others (Feeney, 2002; Fraley, 2019; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Simpson et al., 2007) therefore provided an important theoretical perspective in the study of adult romantic love.

In literature, studies linking insecure romantic attachment and generativity are mostly absent. The only researchers who tried to explore a possible link between them are McAdams (2000), Bell and Richard (2000), and Lawford and colleagues ().

On one hand, Bell and Richard (2000) highlighted the difference between caring and generativity, defining caring as an enduring dyadic emotion that lasts over time and that serves as a motivation to see that the needs of a specific partner are met. According to them, caring about others not only represents a reason for the caregiving process of attachment but also grounds it in emotion rather than in cognition. The special quality that makes caring appropriate as a motivation for caregiving behaviors is that caring is focused on the partner's needs rather than the caregiver's and that is possible due to the profound relational feelings that the one who offers care has towards that specific person. Generativity, on the other hand, regards a concern and a commitment that comes from within the caregiver and is addressed towards the whole society. Therefore, generativity is guided by a sense of responsibility that, according to McAdams (2000), is a strong intention fueled by an emotion behind it. Unlike caring, then, generativity seems to sink its roots in cognition and purpose rather than in emotion. Therefore, it appears that we are dealing with processes of a different order: caring is primarily associated with a limbic and subcortical dimension, while generativity is more connected to a frontal dimension. Because of its intentional aspect, generativity may be considered a process of a higher level than caring. According to these authors, scholars should then be careful to not overlap these constructs because caring, regardless of its crucial role in the caregiving process of attachment, is not the same thing as generativity.

On the other hand, if the mentioned above authors have only theoretically pointed to an association between attachment and generativity, Lawford and other researchers (2008, 2018) have also conducted studies to examine associations of attachment styles and attachment representations with generative concern in adolescence. Associations with attachment styles were examined longitudinally using the *Experiences in Close Relationships questionnaire—ECR* (Brennan et al., 1998) while associations with attachment representations were measured concurrently through the *Adult Attachment Interview—AAI* (George et al., 1985). The limits of this research, though, were having examined only one aspect of generativity (i.e., generative concern) in relation to attachment in a small sample size of only adolescents.

The Present Study

To add to the existing knowledge, the current research presents itself as the first study that investigates what contributes to the development of generativity by examining simultaneously not only the role of sociodemographic features but also that of a psychological construct, such as insecure romantic attachment, on generativity. Based on the above-reviewed findings, we hypothesize that a series of sociodemographic variables and above all insecure romantic attachment could predict the two most frequently studied aspects of generativity, which are the generative concern and generative acts towards the next generations.

Our research questions are the following:

1. Do sociodemographic variables (i.e., age, gender, having children, years of education), alone and interactively, significantly predict generativity (i.e., generative concern and generative acts)?
2. Above all, do the two dimensions of insecure romantic attachment (i.e., anxiety and avoidance) significantly predict generativity (i.e., generative concern and generative acts)?

More specifically, based on the above-reviewed literature, we hypothesized that:

1. Age, female gender, having children and years of education would be positive predictors of higher generativity levels;
2. Controlling for sociodemographic variables, insecure attachment would be a negative predictor of generativity;
3. Gender would interact with having children so that for males, but not for females, having children would increase generativity.

Methods

Study Design and Participants

All of the participants were volunteers who participated in the study from October 2020 to February 2021, and none of them was paid for their participation. Most of the participants were recruited using the snowball sampling procedure and they were asked to complete four questionnaires on a digital and online platform. Ethical approval was obtained by the (*blank for peer review purposes*) board. The inclusion criteria were the following: (a) to be married or cohabiting; (b) to be in a romantic relationship for at least one year; (c) to be of an age between 25 and 65 years (both partners). This resulted in a sample of 427 adults (61,8% women) ranging in age from 25 to 65 years ($M = 46.6$ years, $SD = 10.6$ years), among which 424 (99.3%) were Italian. Regarding education (years of education: $M = 15.5$, $SD = 2.91$), only 10 individuals (2,3%) had an elementary school degree or a junior high's, whereas 181 of the participants (42.4%) had a high school diploma, 6 participants (1.4%) had taken a professional course, 57 (13.4%) had a bachelor's degree or had taken a post-graduate course, 140 (32.8%) had a master's degree, and 33 (7.7%) had a PhD. At last, as for having children, 105 of the participants (24.6%) had no children whereas the remaining 322 (75.4%) had at least one. More specifically, among the latter, 169 individuals (39.6%) had 2 children, 99 (23.2%) had only 1 child, 35 (8.2%) had three children, and only 19 participants (4.4%) had more than three children.

Measures

The Experiences in Close Relationships Revised (ECR-R) Scale

(Fraley et al., 2000; Italian version: Busonera et al., 2014), a 36-item self-report questionnaire for the classification of insecure romantic attachment style, comprising two scales (i.e., Anxiety Scale and Avoidance Scale) that assess attachment anxiety and avoidance. Participants answered on a seven-point Likert-type scale from 1 “Strongly disagree” to 7 “Strongly agree”, and both scales showed satisfactory internal consistency: $\alpha = 0.84$ for the Anxiety Scale and $\alpha = 0.86$ for the Avoidance Scale.

The Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS)

(McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992), is a 20-item self-report scale which primarily assesses individual differences in generative concern. Participants indicated their agreement

with each item on a 4-point scale from 0 “The statement never applies to you” to 3 “The statement applies to you very often”. In our sample, Cronbach's alpha coefficient has been calculated for the Italian version of the 20-item self-report scale, obtained with the forward-backwards translation, and it is relatively satisfactory ($\alpha=0.79$) and comparable to the one reported in the original validation study (i.e., $\alpha=0.83$, as reported in McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992).

The Generativity Behaviors Checklist (GBC)

(McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992), a behaviors checklist that includes 50 items of which 40 refer to everyday actions that are suggestive of generativity (e.g., item 1: “taught somebody a skill”) and 10 refer to acts purportedly unrelated to generativity (e.g., item 46: “attended a party”). The participants marked a 0 if the act had not been performed during the previous 2 months, a 1 if the act had been performed once during that period, and a 2 if the act had been performed more than once during the previous 2 months. In our sample, Cronbach's alpha coefficient has been calculated for the Italian version of the 50-item checklist, obtained with the forward-backwards translation, and it shows great internal consistency ($\alpha=0.95$).

Analytic Plan

First, descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among the study variables were computed. Afterwards, a blockwise regression with three separate blocks (models 1–3) was tested for both dependent variables (i.e., generative concern and generative acts). In line with hypothesis 1, model 1 included sociodemographic variables (i.e., age, gender, having children, years of education) as predictors of generativity. Following hypothesis 2, model 2 explored the additional contribution of insecure romantic attachment as a predictor of generativity. Finally, in line with hypothesis 3, model 3

added the interaction effect between gender and having children to model 2. BIC and AIC comparative indices and ΔR^2 of all the tested models were computed and adopted to find the best-fitting model. The analyses were conducted using the statistical software jamovi (the jamovi project, 2021).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

In Table 1 are reported means, *SDs* and Pearson's *r* correlation values among the variables of interest. Among the sociodemographic variables, results showed that there were no significant associations between age, gender, having children and both dimensions of generativity (i.e., generative concern and generative acts), whereas the only significant and positive correlation emerged between years of education and only one of the dimensions of generativity, that is generative concern. On the other hand, data confirmed the hypothesized bivariate association between the two dimensions of insecure romantic attachment (i.e., anxiety and avoidance) on generative concern, but not on generative acts. Significant negative correlations emerged between anxiety and avoidance and generative concern whereas the associations with generative acts were not significant.

Hierarchical Regression Results

In Tables 2 and 3 two blockwise regressions with three separate blocks (models 1–3) were tested for generative concern and generative acts. Results showed that, concerning generative concern, model 2 (AIC = 288; BIC = 291; $\Delta R^2 = 0.05^{***}$) outperformed model 1 (AIC = 290; BIC = 293) and model 3 (AIC = 288; BIC = 292; $\Delta R^2 = 0.00$). About generative acts, model 1 (AIC = 373; BIC = 376), model 2 (AIC = 373; BIC = 377; $\Delta R^2 = 0.00$)

Table 1 Descriptive and Bivariate Correlations

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	427	46.6	10.6	—							
2. Gender	427	1.38	0.49	.28***	—						
3. Having children	427	1.75	0.43	.46***	.12*	—					
4. Years of Education	427	15.5	2.91	-.20***	-.09	-.12*	—				
5. Anxiety	427	53.0	16.3	.08	.11*	.08	-.07	—			
6. Avoidance	427	84.0	14.0	.27***	.10*	.22***	-.07	.48***	—		
7. Generative Concern	427	33.6	7.37	.00	-.06	.07	.21***	-.22***	-.18***	—	
8. Generative Acts	427	37.7	19.0	-.03	-.09	.02	.07	-.02	.02	.40***	—

Gender (1 = F; 2 = M); having children (1 = no; 2 = yes)

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2 Hierarchical Regression Results for Generative Concern

Variable	<i>B</i>	95% CI for <i>B</i>		<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
		<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>				
Model 1						.06	.06
Constant	22.41	16.66	28.15	2.92			
Age	0.01	−0.06	0.09	0.04	.02		
Gender	−0.86	−2.33	0.61	0.75	−.06		
Having children	1.65	−0.14	3.44	0.91	.10		
Years of Education	0.57***	0.33	0.81	0.12	.23***		
Model 2						.11	.05***
Constant	26.77	20.83	32.70	3.02			
Age	0.03	−0.04	0.11	0.04	.05		
Gender	−0.60	−2.04	0.83	0.73	−.04		
Having children	2.05	0.30	3.80	0.89	.12		
Years of Education	0.54***	0.31	0.78	0.12	.22***		
Anxiety	−0.07**	−0.11	−0.02	0.02	−.15**		
Avoidance	−0.07*	−0.13	−0.01	0.03	−.13*		
Model 3						.11	.00
Constant	29.31	19.50	39.12	4.99			
Age	0.03	−0.04	0.11	0.04	.05		
Gender	−2.62	−8.96	3.72	3.22	−.17		
Having children	0.57	−4.29	5.43	2.47	.03		
Years of Education	0.55***	0.31	0.78	0.12	.22***		
Anxiety	−0.07**	−0.11	−0.02	0.02	−.15**		
Avoidance	−0.07*	−0.12	−0.01	0.03	−.13*		
Gender*Having children	1.13	−2.32	4.58	1.76	.17		

CI=confidence interval; *LL*=lower limit; *UL*=upper limit**p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001

and model 3 (AIC = 374; BIC = 377; $\Delta R^2 = 0.00$) received a comparable degree of support. Hence, for parsimonious reasons, and considering the significant change in variance from model to model, we retained model 1.

Exploration of Regression Parameters

Concerning generative concern, model 2, which considered sociodemographic variables and insecure romantic attachment as predictors of generative concern, explained more variance if compared to model 1 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.05^{***}$), and also outperformed model 3 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.00$). One sociodemographic variable, namely years of education, and both dimensions of insecure romantic attachment (i.e., anxiety and avoidance) significantly predicted generative concern. On one hand, years of education positively predicted generative concern: more educated people showed higher levels of generativity. On the other, insecure romantic attachment negatively predicted generative concern: those with higher levels of anxiety and avoidance scored lower levels of generative concern. Pertaining to generative acts, the parameters of the three models were all non-significant.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate the impact of sociodemographic features (i.e., age, gender, having children, years of education) and above all insecure romantic attachment (i.e., anxiety and avoidance) on generativity in adults. Based on the existing literature, we expected that the mentioned above sociodemographic variables would predict the two most frequently studied aspects of generativity, such as generative concern and generative acts towards the next generations, and that the levels of both of them would decrease in individuals with higher levels of anxiety and avoidance.

We explored bivariate associations among age, gender, having children, years of education, anxiety and avoidance on generative concern and generative acts. Results showed that age, gender and having children did not relevantly affect generative concern or generative acts. This does not confirm previous findings, where a significant positive correlation was found between age (Keyes & Ryff, 1998; McAdams, 2013; McAdams, 2019; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; McAdams et al., 1998; Peterson, 1998; Ryff

Table 3 Hierarchical Regression Results for Generative Acts

Variable	<i>B</i>	95% CI for <i>B</i>		<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
		<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>				
Model 1						.01	.01
Constant	34.13	18.98	49.27	7.71			
Age	−0.03	−0.23	0.17	0.10	−.02		
Gender	−3.20	−7.07	0.67	1.97	−.08		
Having children	1.75	−2.96	6.46	2.40	.04		
Years of Education	0.40	−0.23	1.04	0.32	.06		
Model 2						.01	.00
Constant	34.88	18.77	51.00	8.20			
Age	−0.04	−0.25	0.16	0.10	−.02		
Gender	−3.13	−7.01	0.76	1.98	−.08		
Having children	1.58	−3.17	6.32	2.41	.04		
Years of Education	0.40	−0.24	1.03	0.32	.06		
Anxiety	−0.04	−0.16	0.09	0.06	−.03		
Avoidance	0.06	−0.09	0.22	0.08	.05		
Model 3						.01	.00
Constant	34.58	7.95	61.21	13.55			
Age	−0.04	−0.25	0.16	0.10	−.02		
Gender	−2.88	−20.09	14.32	8.75	−.07		
Having children	1.76	−11.44	14.95	6.71	.04		
Years of Education	0.40	−0.24	1.03	0.32	.06		
Anxiety	−0.04	−0.16	0.09	0.06	−.03		
Avoidance	.06	−0.09	0.22	0.08	.05		
Gender*Having children	−0.14	−9.50	9.23	4.77	−.01		

CI=confidence interval; *LL*=lower limit; *UL*=upper limit* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

& Heincke, 1983; Stewart & Vandewater, 1998), gender, having children (Epstein, 1988; McAdams, 2001; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; McAdams et al., 1998; Miller-McLemore, 2004; Miller-McLemore, 2007; Millman & Kanter, 1987; Stewart & Ostrove, 1998) and generativity. The lack of association we identified in our study may be explained in many ways.

First of all, young individuals in several current societies are better equipped than their past generations to significantly contribute to the advancement of their families, communities and societies due to the improved education and health systems. Today's youth seems to be more involved in pro-social and pro-community behaviors than ever (Arnett, 2013). A lot of young adults are found to be collaborating with one or more associations (e.g., cultural, recreational, sports, music) through which they can simultaneously engage in helping society and establishing new interpersonal meaningful relationships where they can develop a sense of belonging and share supportive actions, ideas and values, opening up to a horizon full of meaning and purpose. All of this may thus explain why young adults not only feel a strong urge to positively contribute to the next generations, but they also seem able to translate this "urgency" into actual generative acts, finding alternative ways to overcome the absence

of the status and the economic resources that authors like Stewart and Vandewater (1998) believed to be indispensable to transform generative concern into generative behavior. In fact, in the last decades, young people have proved to be generous and capable to improve the world they live in, tenaciously looking after their communities and serving their countries, effortly trying to create a society that is more inclusive, welcoming and equal.

Second, although it is undeniable that caring behaviors have been considered a woman's prerogative for a long time along with the duty to pass on and preserve social, cultural and family traditions, these findings may signify that individuals are moving towards the weakening of these considerations based on gender stereotypes. As the author Miller-McLemore (2004) stated, learning the art of caring is not a task nor a duty that falls solely on women, but a virtue of high value to all people, including men. Promoting the well-being of all humanity should indeed be everyone's responsibility and mission.

Third, the fact that having children is not associated with higher levels of generativity in either men or women might reveal that, nowadays, whether a person has ever been a parent to a child or not seems to not make a difference in predicting his/her generativity. Therefore, people could desire

to make the world a better place for the next generations regardless of whether they are parents or not.

However, bivariate associations and then two blockwise regressions with three separate blocks (models 1–3), among which model 2 received the best support, revealed that only one sociodemographic variable, such as years of education, and both the dimensions of insecure romantic attachment, which are anxiety and avoidance, could be considered predictors of generative concern but not of generative acts. All the models run to investigate the possible predictors of generative acts were in fact statistically not significant. Therefore, these results indicate that more years spent studying could lead to stronger levels of generative concern, and that lower levels of the latter would possibly be found in individuals with higher levels of anxiety and avoidance.

The emerged positive prediction between years of education and generative concern confirmed existing literature (Jonsson & Mills, 1993; Keyes & Ryff, 1998; McAdams et al., 1993; Piff et al., 2010; Stewart & Ostrove, 1998), according to which a higher level of education attained by more years spent in studying may lead to a higher social status and a better quality of life that altogether might have an impact on individuals' responsible and conscious concern for future generations. We could speculate that more educated people could present an increased awareness and understanding of the rising demand, especially in current post-modern societies, to take care of the prosperity of the whole wide world, through the willingness to generatively care for the future of all humanity.

As for the two dimensions of insecure attachment (i.e., anxiety and avoidance) that were found to negatively correlate and predict only one (i.e., generative concern) of the two aspects representing generativity in the current study, these results are important for the following reasons. Anxious individuals view themselves negatively, do not trust others, and present strong doubts about the trustworthiness of the world surrounding them. Therefore, they may not find a meaning or a purpose in fostering future generations by taking care of them. Similarly, avoidant individuals, although they may alternate a positive view of themselves with a negative one, definitely see others negatively and consider being close and intimate with people as something undesirable and surely hostile. Therefore, both avoidant and anxious individuals seem to severely lack trust in humankind, strongly doubting the reliability of people, and this could lead to them feeling very little responsibility towards their society and the people that live in it. These individuals do not know how to step out of a self-referential perspective and they seem unable to open themselves to an intersubjective exchange in which recognition of the other is essential. Thus, it is understandable that individuals with higher levels of anxiety and avoidance have scored lower on generative concern in our study.

On the other hand, no association was found between insecure attachment and generative acts. Anxious individuals tend to be very concerned about the possibility of being abandoned and consequently they seem to engage in hyperactivation strategies and non-stop ruminations to keep people close to them. Therefore, they might behave in a complacent way to prevent others from thinking badly of them and to ensure that they receive their approval (Lawford et al., 2018). Avoidant individuals, on the other hand, might help others to feel better about themselves and protect their fragile self-esteem. Thus, they would engage in generative acts to gain personal benefits such as a positive view of themselves (Mikulincer et al., 2005). Then, according to these reflections, the two dimensions of insecure attachment (i.e., anxiety and avoidance) would not be associated with a decrease in the expression of generative acts, although the latter might not be motivated by genuine and disinterested intentions. Therefore, anxious and avoidant individuals' behaviors might not be sustained by a genuine generative concern, but by another selfish motivation that needs further investigation.

Limitations and Conclusions

This study adds to the existing literature, that has primarily focused on the role of sociodemographic variables on generativity, the identification of a psychological construct, such as insecure romantic attachment, that can better explain what influences the two most studied aspects of generativity in adulthood, which are generative concern and generative acts. Therefore, a major strength of the present empirical research lies in its innovative nature. In fact, this study can be considered the first one regarding the influence of insecure romantic attachment on generativity and it explored the processes underlying each construct. Another important factor consists of the relatively large sample size. This research also implemented for the first time an Italian translation of the two instruments used to measure generative concern and generative acts such as *The Loyola Generativity Scale – LGS* and *The Generativity Behaviors Checklist—GBC* (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992) and the acceptable internal consistency found could be considered in favour of the adoption of these instruments for the Italian population.

Nonetheless, the empirical results reported here should be considered in light of some limitations. The first concerns a lack of previous research studies, which means that the basis of the literature review for our study was limited. Also, the sample might not reflect the general population because of the scarce access to a more diversified community due to the use of the snowball sampling procedure. Furthermore, we were not able to include an important research question such as “does secure attachment

significantly predict generativity?”, because *The Experiences in Close Relationships Revised (ECR-R) Scale* (Fraley et al., 2000; Italian version: Busonera et al., 2014) comprises two scales (i.e., Anxiety Scale and Avoidance Scale) that only assess insecure romantic attachment without taking into consideration secure romantic attachment. At last, having included only self-report questionnaires to test our hypothesis could have led to many individuals being influenced by social desirability and not being able to assess themselves accurately.

It is recommended to replicate this study using qualitative and quantitative instruments. Some examples could be *The Current Relationship Interview—CRI* (Crowell & Owens, 1996), which is the most frequently used interview to detect adult attachment in couple relationships, and *The Generativity Themes in Autobiographical Episodes* (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992, 1012), which consists of specific questions that aim to investigate generativity-related autobiographical experiences, which refer to that component of generativity that in the McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) model is called “narration”. Finally, it would be equally useful to conduct longitudinal studies to analyze and observe the developmental trajectories of all the mentioned above phenomena and their component elements, using a multi-informant approach to obtain important information from both members of the same romantic dyad. Further investigation is necessary to improve knowledge of the relationship between romantic attachment and generativity to take preventive action and promote authentically generative behaviors along with secure attachment rather than insecure attachment (i.e., avoidant and anxious). Indeed, the quality of each person's closest relationships and the possibility of truly generative societies emerging could be affected by the incidence of people with insecure attachments in our society. Therefore, promoting and supporting a secure attachment style should not be considered an individual responsibility but a mission that involves all humankind. Generativity, in fact, is a desirable social resource for the community as it allows people to embrace the full meaning of existence and it teaches them how to consciously use their freedom.

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Data Availability The data set associated with the paper is available upon request.

Declarations

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